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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000740

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [NP](#)  
SUBJECT: NEPAL: APRIL 23 KATHMANDU STRIKE WELL OBSERVED;  
POLITICAL PARTIES JUSTIFYING STUDENT EXCESSES

REF: A. KATHMANDU 712  
    B. KATHMANDU 677  
    C. KATHMANDU 723

Classified By: DCM ROBERT K. BOGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

Valley Strike: Quiet Streets

[¶1.](#) (U) A general strike, or bandh, called for Kathmandu Valley by the Nepali Congress (Democratic) Party student union was generally widely observed on April 23. A few private and commercial vehicles were seen plying the streets, while most shops remained shuttered. There were a few scattered reports of minor vandalism to private and government vehicles, but the capital remained largely peaceful throughout the day. The international schools, including the school attended by most Mission children, closed for the day (Ref A). The Embassy has received no reports of threats or injuries to American citizens as a result of the strike. The Peace Corps Country Director reported that all volunteers were coping well with the strike. The Embassy will hold an Emergency Action Committee in the coming days to address two additional national strikes called by student unions for April 28 and 29 (Ref B).

Political Parties Use Students as Surrogates

[¶2.](#) (C) Emboffs, including the Ambassador and DCM, have complained to senior political leaders that students in their affiliated unions have committed acts of violence and vandalism during demonstrations over the past few weeks. Most of our interlocutors, while trying to disassociate themselves from the violence, have attempted to portray the protests as spontaneous expressions of public dissatisfaction that they claim they have not orchestrated and cannot control. Spokesmen for the two largest parties, the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) and the Nepali Congress (Koirala), have tried to draw parallels between the current student unrest and the popular demonstrations of the 1990 People's Movement, which resulted in the restoration of democracy. When asked to make an unequivocal public statement denouncing violent protests, they have demurred, trying to justify their public silence on this issue by assuring us that they are telling their students in private to avoid violence. (Note: The notable exception has been former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress (Democratic) president Sher Bahadur Deuba, who told the Ambassador on April 21 that his party was passing a resolution against violence and that his students' strike would thus eschew violence. As promised, today's strike was noticeably more peaceful. End note.) Other leaders, however, seem decidedly unwilling to counsel their student wings against violence. On the contrary, Nepali Congress (Koirala) President G.P. Koirala lashed out against the government in the press for a second time on April 23, charging it was the source of the current political turmoil.

Comment

[¶3.](#) (C) Ever since King Gyanendra appointed the interim government in October, the political parties, outraged by what they perceive as his efforts to marginalize them, have been promising to "launch a joint struggle" against his action. Public indignation against the King's move, however, has proven tepid thus far, and the parties are clearly delighted to use their ever-volatile student wings as surrogates. Unlike the 1990 demonstrations, which were aimed at achieving well-defined democratic reforms, the current protests are diffuse and ill-focused, with no cohesive set of demands and no recognizable public support. The number of different student groups on the street--and the relative anonymity that gives them--can increase the potential for acts of violence. Moreover, even though the Maoist-affiliated wing has officially disassociated itself from the strikes that have occurred since the April 16 decision to postpone student elections, the possiblility

remains that its members might infiltrate these demonstrations, thereby increasing the chance for the protests to turn violent. We will continue to urge the democratic political leaders to adopt a more responsible stand on this important matter.

MALINOWSKI